Considerations in Selecting a Research Problem

When selecting a research problem/topic, there are a number of considerations to keep in mind. These considerations will help to ensure that your study will be manageable and that you remain motivated. These considerations are:

- **Interest** – Interest should be the most important consideration in selecting a research problem. A research endeavour is usually time-consuming and involves hard work and possibly unforeseen problems. If you select a topic that does not greatly interest you, it could become extremely difficult to sustain the required motivation and put in enough time and energy to complete it.

- **Magnitude** – You should have sufficient knowledge about the research process to be able to visualise the work involved in completing the proposed study. Narrow the topic down to something manageable, specific and clear. It is extremely important to select a topic that you can manage within the time and with the resources at your disposal. Even if you are undertaking a descriptive study, you need to consider its magnitude carefully.

- **Measurement of Concepts** – If you are using a concept in your study (in quantitative studies), make sure you are clear about its indicators and their measurement. For example, if you plan to measure the effectiveness of a health promotion programme, you must be clear as to what determines effectiveness and how it will be measured. Do not use concepts in your research problem that you are not sure how to measure. This does not mean you cannot develop a measurement procedure as the study progresses. While most of the developmental work will be done during your study, it is imperative that you are reasonably clear about the measurement of these concepts at this stage.

- **Level of Expertise** – Make sure you have an adequate level of expertise for the task you are proposing. AIIow for the fact that you will learn during the study and may receive help from your research supervisor and others, but remember that you need to do most of the work yourself.

- **Relevance** – Select a topic that is of relevance to you as a professional. Ensure that your study adds to the existing body of knowledge, bridges current gaps or is useful in policy formulation. This will help you to sustain interest in the study.

- **Availability of Data** – If your topic entails collection of information from secondary sources (office records, client records, census or other already-published reports, etc.) make sure that this data is available and in the format you want before finalising your topic.

- **Ethical Issues** – Another important consideration in formulating a research problem is the ethical issues involved. In the course of conducting a research study, the study population may be adversely affected by some of the questions (directly or indirectly); deprived of an intervention; expected to share sensitive and private information or expected to be simply experimental 'guinea pigs'. How ethical issues can affect the study population and how ethical problems can be overcome should be thoroughly examined at the problem-formulation stage.

Source:

Ranjit, K. (2011). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd.